Rhode Island
Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Plan

March 8, 2005

CRMC
Coastal Resources Management Council

NOAA

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Table of Contents

I. Introduction

A. Program Background

The Departments of Commerce and Justice and the State Appropriations Act of 2002 (Public Law 107-77) direct the Secretary of Commerce to establish a Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program (Program) "for the purpose of protecting important coastal and estuarine areas that have significant conservation, recreation, ecological, historical, or aesthetic values, or that are threatened by conversion from their natural or recreational state to other uses." The Program gives priority to lands that can be effectively managed and protected and that have significant ecological value.

The law further directs the secretary to establish guidelines that would make project selection within the Program a more objective and nationally competitive process. To meet this directive, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) publishes Program guidelines (http://coastalmanagement.noaa.gov/pdf/CELCPfinal02Guidelines.pdf) that establish the Program's eligibility, and procedural and programmatic requirements for participation. Coastal states that submit grant applications under the Program must develop a NOAA–approved Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Plan (CELCP). The CELCP provides an assessment of priority land conservation needs and clear guidance for nominating and selecting land conservation projects within the state.

In the past, significant funding for the Program was appropriated (FY 2002, $15.8 million; FY 2003, $36.7 million; FY 2004, $51 million), and projects were congressionally directed. It is expected that now that coastal states and territories are formally submitting CELCPs, the Program will become more objective and nationally competitive as outlined in the NOAA guidelines.

B. Purpose of the Rhode Island Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Plan (CELCP)

As the state's lead agency for coastal management issues, the R.I. Coastal Resources Management Council (RICRMC) has developed the Rhode Island CELCP in coordination with the R.I. Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM), the University of Rhode Island (URI) Coastal Resources Center, and Rhode Island Sea Grant, with involvement from other state agencies and major users of the coast.

The purpose of the CELCP is to assess Rhode Island's priority land conservation needs and provide clear guidance to applicants for nominating and selecting land conservation projects within the state. A NOAA–approved CELCP will allow Rhode Island to compete for federal funds from the Program for acquisition of worthy coastal and estuarine properties.

II. Priorities for Coastal and Estuarine Land Protection

A. Map and description of the geographic extent of the Rhode Island CELCP

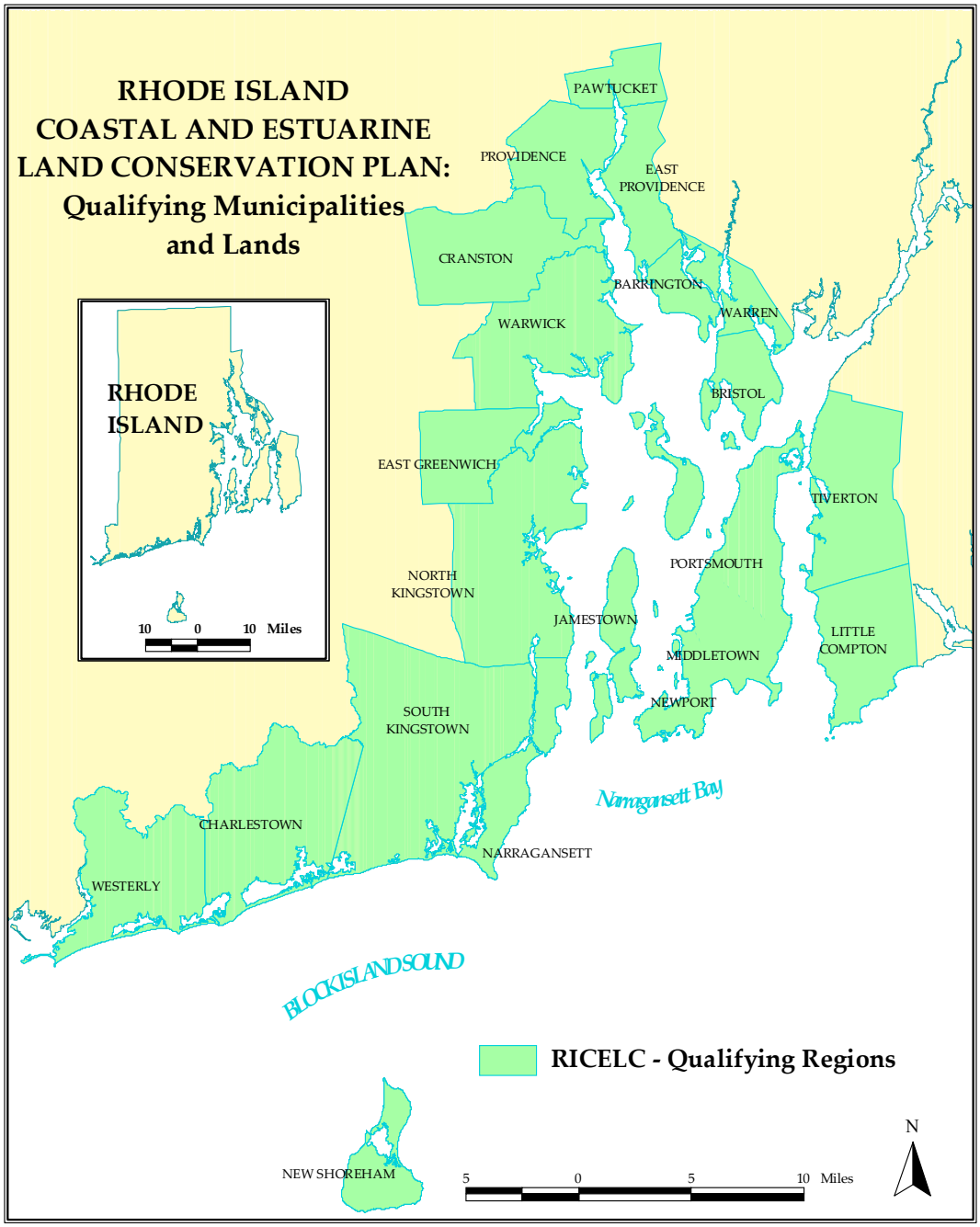

Figure 1: Rhode Island CELCP Geographic boundary

The geographic boundary for the Rhode Island CELCP includes all lands located within the 21 municipalities that abut Rhode Island's coastline along Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island and Block Island Sounds, and the tidal rivers that flow into these water bodies (Figure 1). This geographic area encompasses 100 percent of the state's coastal zone as designated in Rhode Island's federally approved coastal management program under the Coastal Zone Management Act, as well as extends beyond the coastal zone, but not as far inland as the watershed boundary. It also represents 44 percent of the state's land area, and 54 percent of the state's municipalities. Over 70 percent of the state's population lives within this geographic boundary.[1]

The goal for protecting this area is to target vital portions of the contributing watershed that directly impact coastal and estuarine water bodies and shorelines. This focus is critical because the coastal environment within this boundary is experiencing a tremendous amount of development, and natural habitats and potential public access areas are being increasingly converted into residential and commercial development. The restrictive geographic criteria in the Rhode Island CELCP will help to ensure competitiveness on the national level.

B. Types of lands/values to be protected

Existing plans and strategies identify the state's priority coastal and estuarine conservation needs (Attachment 1).

Rhode Island's coastal habitats have suffered from several hundred years of human impacts – development activities that have destroyed or degraded many habitats. Salt marshes have been diked, ditched, and filled. More than 500 dams have been built on our rivers. Seagrass beds have succumbed to coastal development and declines in water quality. Rhode Island's primary seagrass is eelgrass. Eelgrass provides many ecologically valuable functions. It produces organic material that becomes part of the marine food web; helps cycle nutrients; stabilizes marine sediments; and provides important habitat.

Many species of fish and wildlife depend on eelgrass. Eelgrass beds provide protection for bay scallops, quahogs, blue crabs and lobsters. Tautog and other fish lay their eggs on the surface of eelgrass leaves, and young starfish, snails, mussels, and other creatures attach themselves to the plant. Waterfowl such as brant feed on eelgrass. Studies in New England have documented the occurrence of 40 species of fish and 9 species of invertebrates in eelgrass beds.

As new growth replaces older eelgrass leaves, the dead leaves decay, becoming a valuable source of organic matter for microorganisms at the base of the food chain[2]. Eelgrass reduces shoreline erosion caused by storms and wave energetics thus protecting adjacent coastal properties. Eelgrass meadows can stabilize sediments and filter nutrients from the water column. Eelgrass also provides a unique habitat for recreational SCUBA divers and snorklers to explore.

Rhode Island salt marshes are found along the shores of salt ponds, the Narragansett Bay estuary, small embayments (such as Allin's Cove in Barrington), and estuarine rivers (such as the

[1] Rhode Island Statewide Planning. Population of Rhode Island by State, County and City & Town Rhode Island, 1990 &2000. Information taken from U.S. Bureau of the Census.
[2] NOAA Damage Assessment and Restoration Program, 2001. (www.darrp.noaa.gov)

Narrow River estuary). Salt marshes provide nursery grounds and foraging habitat for hundreds of species of fish, shellfish, birds, and mammals. Fish of all sizes, from mummichogs to striped bass, hunt in creeks and ponds. Quahogs and oysters live beneath the surface, while mussels, fiddler crabs, and snails occupy intertidal areas. Many kinds of birds visit the marsh to feed on the fish and invertebrates: osprey and herons, ducks of all sorts, and mosquito-eating sparrows that nest in the marsh. In addition to their habitat value, salt marshes serve as natural pollution treatment systems by filtering out pollutants before they reach our coastal waters. The location of salt marshes between our developed coastal communities and the waters of the state also provides a buffer during storms and flooding.

Seventy-five percent of commercial fish species depend on estuaries for their primary habitat, spawning grounds, and nursery areas. In Rhode Island, the role that salt marshes play in our economy is evidenced by our 75 million dollar commercial fishery and a recreational fishery valued at 150 million dollars. The sweeping vistas afforded by the low lying salt marsh landscape contribute immeasurably to the beauty and serenity of Rhode Island's coastline, as well as our tourism and outdoor recreation industry, which is valued at 2 billion dollars on Narragansett Bay alone.

Anadromous fish runs in Rhode Island occur in rivers, streams, and adjacent areas that drain into coastal ponds, Narragansett Bay, and Block Island Sound. These systems are used by migratory fish to feed and reproduce. River herring, Atlantic salmon, rainbow smelt, sturgeon, and American shad depend on passage upstream for survival. These anadromous fish spawn in fresh water, and mature and spend most of their lives in salt water. Conversely, American eels are catadromous fish, living in lakes and ponds as adults. They migrate downstream and eventually far out into the Atlantic, where they spawn and die in the Sargasso Sea. Their newly born young, less than an inch long, travel on ocean currents back to Rhode Island's rivers and streams.

Many of Rhode Island's rivers are blocked or obstructed by dams, weirs, tide gates, and other water-control structures. In addition to unobstructed passage through the water, migratory fish need healthy riparian areas whose vegetation provides cover, bank stabilization, and temperature regulation. Riparian vegetation also provides detritus (leaf litter, wood, etc.), which forms the base of the riverine food chain. Recreational and commercial fisheries benefit when river corridors remain healthy and passable to migratory fish.

The scientific community has made significant headway in identifying conservation needs for the purpose of protecting these ecological resources. The Rhode Island Estuary and Coastal Habitat Restoration Strategy, led by RICRMC, RIDEM, Save The Bay, and others, involved hundreds of Rhode Island scientists, citizens, and resource users to first identify the habitat restoration needs of the state and subsequently restore salt marshes, re-establish seagrass beds, and restore fish passage to rivers.

Results identify the need to restore salt marshes, seagrass beds, and river systems, including the lands that support these systems. Other plans, including Special Area Management Plans (SAMPs); state, regional, and municipal open space plans; watershed plans; and the Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve Management Plan, identify ecological protection needs including salt ponds, estuarine intertidal wetlands, uninhabited islands, coastal plain ponds, and inland dune beach systems. Many of these efforts were also undertaken with a significant amount of public involvement.

C. Identification of project areas

For the purposes of the Program, "Project Areas" are defined as "Discrete areas to be identified within a CELCP that describe the state's priority areas for conservation based on national (Attachment 3) and state criteria (Attachment 2), representing the values to be protected through the program and areas threatened by conversion."

The Rhode Island CELCP project areas are properties that: 1) are located within a federally approved SAMP boundary; 2) contribute to expanding natural and/or recreational corridors, and 3) provide public access to the coast.

1. Rhode Island SAMPs
(http://www.crmc.ri.gov/samp/index.html)

The goal of a SAMP is to preserve, protect, and restore coastal resources while addressing a diversity of complex and interconnected issues on a watershed scale in a geographic region of special sensitivity that is under intense development pressure. These comprehensive and complex efforts require the participation of multiple local, state, and federal agencies. In addition, public and stakeholder involvement is an essential part of a successful SAMP. SAMPs are recognized in Rhode Island law as effective tools for ecosystem management of the state's coastal resources.

Using the best available science, a state and federally approved SAMP develops policy and management recommendations to guide the actions of private citizens, municipalities, and state agencies within a geographic region that protect the natural system and encourage human activities that do not impair the health of the coastal resources. A SAMP also establishes a decision-making process appropriate to the management of the watershed as an ecosystem, specifically insuring consideration of long term cumulative impacts.

Rhode Island has developed five SAMPs to answer the individual needs of varied urban, suburban, and rural environments and communities. SAMPs for the Providence Harbor, Narrow River, Rhode Island Salt Ponds Region, the Rhode Island/Connecticut Pawcatuck River Estuary, and Greenwich Bay are being actively implemented. The Providence Harbor SAMP is currently being revised and has been renamed the Metro Bay SAMP, focusing on the upper reaches of the Providence River. The natural systems of these watersheds have been recognized by the state and the local communities as critical coastal systems threatened by development and deserving of special management.

2. Properties that expand natural and/or recreational corridors

Providing corridors of unfragmented habitat in urban, suburban, and rural environments is key to maintaining the natural biodiversity of plants and animals, whether they be rare or common species. (*See* In addition, developing recreational corridors for biking, hiking, or canoeing in urban, suburban, and rural environments greatly enhances the recreational activities available within those areas.

Large blocks of contiguous habitat enable support of a diversity of wildlife species through three main methods: 1) providing sufficient ranging area to support populations of large native animals such as deer, coyotes, mink, otter, and raptors; 2) where necessary, creating more separation between sensitive wildlife species and human development, insulating these species from impacts and thereby allowing them to persist; and 3) in many cases, providing a greater diversity of habitat, which in turn increases the suite of resources available to wildlife.

Preserving contiguous greenway corridors to enhance recreational opportunities in rural, suburban, and urban communities that also provide public access to the coast is a Rhode Island priority. In some cases these lands are at the highest risk for developmental conversion. Increasingly, Rhode Islanders turn to the outdoors to relax, have fun, maintain their health and vigor, understand their natural and cultural heritage, and bring added meaning to their lives. Visitors to the state have also sought the pleasures of Rhode Island's natural environment in growing multitudes. Public access to the coast is a priority for the CRMC and has been identified as a priority by Rhode Island coastal communities.

D. Existing plans that are incorporated into the Rhode Island CELCP

Elements of existing plans and strategies were evaluated and incorporated in the CELCP. The most influential plans are described below; a full list is included in Attachment 1. Most of these plans were developed with an extensive amount of public involvement. For example, in 2002, the R.I. Statewide Planning Office and RIDEM completed the Rhode Island Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) with the purpose of identifying recreational needs and priorities for the people of the state. More than 1,400 residents participated in this study. Results identify the need for extended trail systems for walking, biking, kayaking, and canoeing; increased access to Narragansett Bay for fishing, boating, and swimming activities; and more public parks.

In addition to reviewing established plans and strategies, RICRMC met with state and municipal agencies, coastal resource users, environmental organizations, and scientists to ensure these plans are current and accurately reflect Rhode Island's conservation needs. See Section IV (Coordination and Public Involvement) for a complete description of this public process.

Based on this extensive document review and meetings with major stakeholders, RICELCP project areas were identified and draft evaluation criteria (Attachment 2) were created to reflect Rhode Island's existing conservation needs.

1) ***Special Area Management Plans (SAMP)*** (RICRMC)
(http://www.crmc.ri.gov/samp/index.html)
CRMC has been authorized by Rhode Island General Law (RIGL) §46-23 to develop management programs for the protection and enhancement of the state's coastal resources. It has also been given authority to implement the federal Coastal Zone Management Program under RIGL §46-23-15. The SAMP process is part of CRMC's ongoing responsibility under both RIGL §46-23 et. seq. and the Coastal Zone Management Act (CZMA 16 U.S.C. 1451). The Rhode Island SAMPs are:

a) Providence Harbor SAMP (1983; currently being revised, renamed as Metro Bay SAMP) – CRMC's policies and proposals for Providence Harbor are designed to achieve five major goals: balanced and compatible shoreline use, improved water quality (including pollution abatement programs, water quality monitoring, and estuarine research), port development, increased recreational opportunities and public access, and coordination and consultation among those involved in developing, using, enjoying, regulating, and managing the urban waterfront in order to achieve a successful balance among new and old uses of the harbor.

b) Narrow River SAMP (1999) – The Narrow River SAMP describes the present status of the river, characterizes its watershed, identifies sources of pollution, and recommends specific actions to restore, protect and preserve this highly regarded natural resource. The Narrow River SAMP was developed with recognition of how water quality, land use, habitat, storm hazards, and geology interact to impact the health of the Narrow River.

c) Rhode Island's Salt Pond Region SAMP: Maschaug to Point Judith Ponds (1999) – The Salt Pond SAMP was designed to consider how water quality, land use, habitat, storm hazards, and geology all interact to impact the health of the salt ponds. The Salt Pond SAMP also implements recommendations of the Narragansett Bay Project by developing the following: statewide critical resource protection policies, including objective criteria for designating critical resources; a geographic information systems (GIS)-based inventory of identified resources; regulatory and non-regulatory controls to protect identified resources; and an assessment of cumulative impacts through the Coastal Resources Management Program. Finally, the SAMP implements Rhode Island's Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program (CNPCP). Beyond fulfilling program requirements and recommendations, the revisions to the SAMP address the challenge of a growing population and the need for innovative land-use controls to address the impacts of existing and proposed development on the salt ponds.

d) The Pawcatuck River Estuary and Little Narragansett Bay: An Interstate Management Plan (1992) – This plan describes the current status of the resources within the estuary, characterizes its watershed, identifies estuary resources of concern, and recommends management strategies and other initiatives concerning the use and protection of this highly regarded estuary. Accomplishing this involved the enlistment of a citizen's advisory committee to assist in developing an issues list that reflected public concerns about the estuary. Development and research of these issues involved the collection of data regarding past and current land-use and development trends, water quality status, critical wildlife habitats, recreational patterns of use, and the development of new investigations conducted by the project's staff. The Interstate Management Plan has put forth management regulations and initiatives, programs, and strategies that are focused on coordination of government agencies and bodies, identification and restoration of sources of pollution, identification and protection of critical wildlife habitats, guidance and management measures for various uses of the estuary, and provision of a consistent, ecologically based policy framework for decisions involving the use of the estuary's resources.

e) Greenwich Bay SAMP – Public access to the bay is essential so that residents and visitors can take advantage of the many coastal recreational opportunities it offers. The Greenwich Bay watershed provides areas to swim, clam, boat, and engage in other water-dependent activities. Many residents work in the area and depend on access to the water for their

livelihoods. The goals of the SAMP are to maintain existing public access and increase future access to Greenwich Bay.

2) ***Northeast Coastal Areas Study: Significant Coastal Habitats of Southern New England and Portions of Long Island, New York*** (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 1991) – In 1990, Congress funded a study to identify coastal areas in southern New England and Long Island in which fish and wildlife habitat and natural diversity needed protection or preservation. The Northeast Coastal Area Study identifies species of regional importance, and describes regionally significant habitat complexes. It specifically describes significant or unique habitats, threats to sustaining habitat complexes, and considerations for conserving and protecting them.

3) ***Rhode Island State Estuary and Coastal Habitat Restoration Strategy*** (RICRMC, RIDEM, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program, Save The Bay, Natural Resources Conservation Service) (http://www.crmc.ri.gov/projects/projectfiles/habreststrategy_application.pdf)
– With assistance from hundreds of Rhode Island scientists, citizens, and resource users, this strategy identifies restoration needs for the purpose of protecting the state's coastal and estuarine resources, primarily salt marshes, seagrass beds, and fishways. The strategy, developed by the Rhode Island Habitat Restoration Team, which serves as a Technical Advisory Committee to CRMC, has been adopted and implemented by CRMC. According to the strategy, habitat restoration grant monies are dispersed in accordance with the Coastal and Estuary Habitat Restoration Program and Trust Fund (RIGL §46-23.1-5(2)), which allocates funding for design, planning, construction, or monitoring. Eligible applicants include cities and towns; any committee, board, or commission chartered by a city or town; nonprofit corporations; civic groups, educational institutions; and state agencies.

4) ***Rhode Island National Wildlife Refuge Complex: Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Environmental Assessment*** (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) – (http://library.fws.gov/ccps.htm)
In 1997, Congress passed the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act, establishing a unifying mission for the refuge system, and a new process for determining compatible public-use activities on refuges. It also required that a CCP be prepared for each refuge. In 2002, the final draft of this document incorporated findings and recommendations from The Northeast Coastal Areas Study, the North American Waterfowl Management Plan, the Partners in Flight Landbird Conservation Plan (1998 draft), Connecticut River/Long Island Sound Ecosystem Priorities (1997), both piping plover and American burying beetle recovery plans, the Regional Wetlands Concept Plan, and the strategy document Protecting Our Land Resources: A Land Acquisition and Protection Plan (RIDEM), and the Rhode Island SAMPs.

5) ***Critical Lands Project*** – (Natural Resources Conservation Service, EPA, and the URI Environmental Data Center) (http://www.edc.uri.edu/criticallands/)
The Critical Lands Project was designed to develop a statewide inventory of critical data for land conservation prioritization and conduct co-occurrence analyses for the communities in Washington County and West Greenwich, R.I. Resource themes and constituent RIGIS data used in the critical lands analysis include:

Farmland Resources

Agricultural lands (1995 LULC dataset)
Prime and Important soils (SSURGO data)
Cultural, Recreational, and Aesthetic Resources
Scenic Inventory (RIDEM)
Historical Regions (1998 RIGIS version)
Greenway Corridors (RIGIS, DOP)
Biodiversity Resources
Wetlands (1995 RIGIS LULC)
Land within 100m of wetlands, rivers/streams, estuaries, shore
Forests (1995 RIGIS LULC)
Lands within 100m of already protected land (TNC dataset)
RIDEM heritage dataset on critical/unique habitats
Groundwater Resources
Aquifers (RIGIS, RIDEM)
Aquifer Recharge Areas (RIGIS, RIDEM)
Wellhead Protection Areas (RIGIS, RIDEM)
Protected Lands
RIDEM Management Areas (RIGIS)
Audubon Land (TNC, RIGIS)
Nature Conservancy Land (TNC)
Land Trust Properties (TNC)
Federal Refuges (RIGIS)

6) ***Rhode Island Resource Protection Project*** (EPA, URI Environmental Data Center) – (http://www.edc.uri.edu/rirpp/)
The Rhode Island Resource Protection Project is part of a New England-wide effort, initiated in 1995 by EPA-Region 1, the state environmental regulatory agencies, and the New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission to identify the region's most ecologically healthy areas. Recognizing that human health and welfare are dependent on healthy, functioning, natural ecosystems, and that there is a limited amount of time and money to spend on protecting the natural resources that together comprise ecosystems, this process was developed to target the state's most important natural resources requiring attention. The Rhode Island Resource Protection Project developed a series of 17 GIS data layers that detail statewide resources.

7) ***North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA)*** – (http://www.fws.gov/birdhabitat/Grants/NAWCA/index.shtm)
In 2003, the U.S. Congress recognized the importance of conserving habitat for migratory birds by passing the North American Wetlands Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. section § 4401 et. seq.). The act encourages partnerships to conserve North American wetland ecosystems for waterfowl, other migratory birds, fish, and wildlife. It encourages the formation of public-private partnerships to develop and implement wetland conservation projects consistent with the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. It creates the North American Wetlands Conservation Fund to help support projects through grants and lists proposal evaluation factors to be considered by the Council.

8) **Rhode Island State Guide Plan Element 152: *Ocean State Outdoors: Rhode Island's Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* (*Ocean State Outdoors*)** (2003) –

(http://www.planning.ri.gov/sgp/sgp.htm)
This document, adopted by the State Planning Council on March 13, 2003, serves as Rhode Island's comprehensive plan for outdoor recreation, conservation, and open space. This plan, the seventh edition, reaffirms the overarching goals established in the 1992 plan, reassesses the present situation, and establishes the objectives and the implementation strategies for strengthening outdoor recreation, conservation, and open space in Rhode Island over the next five years.

The 2003 edition of the plan was prepared by RIDEM and R.I. Statewide Planning Program. As a Rhode Island state policy document, *Ocean State Outdoors* serves several key purposes:

a) State Guide Plan. Because the plan is an element of the Rhode Island State Guide Plan, it has legislated a statute that requires the consistency of all publicly supported activities, including planning and project implementation. State agencies, municipalities, and all public and private entities receiving public support are expected to carry out any recreation, conservation, and open space activity in a way that is consistent with this element of the State Guide Plan;

b) State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). *Ocean State Outdoors* is also submitted by Rhode Island to meet the National Park Service's planning eligibility requirements for the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund program. While resources of this program have diminished, it remains a valuable source of support for protecting resources and providing facilities for public recreational use;

c) State Recreational Trails Plan. In concert with State Guide Plan Element 155, *A Greener Path … Greenspace and Greenways for Rhode Island's Future*, this plan addresses the requirements of the U.S. Department of Transportation-Federal Highway Administration's National Recreational Trails Program that provides funds to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related facilities.

d) Wetlands Priority Plan. This plan provides an update to the wetlands priority plan required under the federal Emergency Wetlands Conservation Act. Updates to the original 1988 plan are submitted to the National Park Service periodically as part of SCORP updates.

9) **Rhode Island State Guide Plan Element 162: Rivers Policy and Classification Plan (1998)**– (http://www.planning.ri.gov/sgp/pdf/162.pdf)
Adopted by the State Planning Council as an element of the State Guide Plan in 1998, this plan is intended to provide clear, integrated, affirmative guidance for the management and protection of Rhode Island's rivers and freshwater resources at the state, local, and watershed level. Its broad objectives are to protect drinking water supplies and pristine rivers, to encourage recreational use of rivers, to foster the creation of greenways, and to provide for the clean-up of rivers. The plan states that the focus should be to: 1) preserve open space, natural resources, and features; 2) preserve cultural and historic landscapes and features; 3) preserve opportunities for recreational use of rivers; 3) encourage the establishment of greenways that link open spaces together; and 4) continue the regional and comprehensive planning activities for rivers, water quality, and land use conducted by RIDEM and the R.I. Department of Administration.

10) **Rhode Island State Historical Preservation Plan (1998)** –
(http://www.planning.ri.gov/sgp/pdf/140.pdf)
the State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission implemented a consultative public process to create a plan to guide community activities related to prioritizing historic preservation projects and developing a system to manage the data from these projects. The goals for this plan are to: 1) locate, identify, and evaluate all of Rhode Island's historic resources; 2) insure that those who own, care for, and invest in historic buildings, areas, and archeological sites have the technical and financial assistance they need; 3) strengthen the protection of historic buildings, areas, and archeological sites from inappropriate alteration, neglect, and demolition; 4) build better communities through historic preservation; 5) increase public understanding of the values of historic buildings, areas, and archeological sites.

Planning Efforts

11) ***Rhode Island Habitat Restoration Portal*** (RICRMC, NOAA, RIDEM, URI Environmental Data Center) – (http://www.edc.uri.edu/restoration/)
The purpose of this site is to provide data and information about habitat restoration in Rhode Island to the public, federal and state agencies, and nonprofit groups. The focus is on seagrass, riverine (fish runs), and salt marsh habitats. The objective is to create an information system that can help users to apply for grants, select potential projects, educate the public, and to assist the state in restoration planning.

12) ***Atlas of Narragansett Bay Coastal Habitats*** (EPA, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program) – (http://www.nbep.org/)
This 2001 coastal habitat inventory provides baseline information to support studies on habitat changes over time as well as to identify and prioritize potential habitat restoration projects. The purpose of the atlas is to inform the general public, municipalities, and resource managers of the findings of the Narragansett Bay coastal habitat inventory study.

13) ***Rhode Island Critical Resource Atlas*** (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Department of Agriculture, Rhode Island Agricultural Experiment Station, URI Department of Natural Resources Science, The Rhode Island Natural History Survey, and the URI Environmental Data Center) (http://www.edc.uri.edu/riatlas/) –
The Rhode Island Critical Resource Atlas designates 12 watersheds that lie within and cover most of the state as critical resources: Blackstone River, Hunt River, Moshassuck River, Narragansett Bay (including the Providence and Seekonk rivers), Pawcatuck River, Pawtuxet River, Saugatucket River, Taunton River, Ten Mile River, Warren River, Westport River, and Woonasquatucket River watersheds.

14) ***Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program Database*** (RIDEM, Rhode Island Natural History Survey) (http://www.uri.edu/ce/rinhs/database/db_rinhp.htm) – Initially developed at RIDEM, the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program database of state and federally listed rare species and critical habitats is currently managed by the Rhode Island Natural History Survey (URI). A natural communities database is currently under development.

III. State Process for Implementing the RICELC Plan

A. Identification of Rhode Island lead agency

The RICRMC is the lead state agency within Rhode Island responsible for the development of the state's CELCP. In 1971, the Rhode Island General Assembly passed legislation that created the RICRMC and charged it to "...preserve, protect, develop, and where possible, restore the coastal resources of the state for this and succeeding generations through comprehensive and coordinated long-range planning and management designed to produce the maximum benefit for society from such coastal resources; and that the preservation and restoration of ecological systems shall be the primary guiding principal upon which environmental alteration of coastal resources shall be measured, judged and regulated."[3]

The RICRMC is authorized to formulate policies and plans, to adopt regulations necessary to implement its various management programs; coordinate its functions with local, state, and federal governments on coastal resources issues (including advising the Governor, the General Assembly, and the public on coastal matters), and act as binding arbitrator in any dispute involving both the resources of the state's coastal region and the interests of two or more municipalities or state agencies. It is also responsible for the designation of all public rights-of-way to the tidal water areas of the state, and carrying on a continued discovery of appropriate public rights-of-way.

B. Agencies Eligible to Hold Title of Property Acquired Using CELCP Funds

NOAA's Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program will award funds for projects that are selected and funded as a result of the competitive process. CELCP funds may be used to purchase 1) lands or 2) conservation easements. Although government and non-government entities, including non-profit organizations, may partner in the acquisition project, only the following state or local governmental agencies are eligible to hold title to purchased lands:

- Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management
- Any of the 21 coastal communities within the Rhode Island CELCP boundary: Westerly, Charlestown, South Kingstown, Narragansett, North Kingstown, East Greenwich, Warwick, Cranston, Pawtucket, Providence, East Providence, Barrington, Warren, Bristol, Tiverton, Little Compton, Jamestown, Portsmouth, Middletown, Newport, and New Shoreham

C. Rhode Island CELCP Project Nomination Process

Upon initial notification from NOAA of the availability of CELCP funding, and following review of any specific NOAA selection criteria different from, or in addition to, what is already discussed in the CELCP guidelines, the RICRMC will prepare and distribute a CELCP Request for Applications (RFA). This initial RFA will be the primary mechanism through which potential acquisition projects would be solicited. The RFA will be sent to all state agencies with an interest

[3] R.I. Coastal Resources Management Council. 2004. http://www.crmc.ri.gov/.

in using CELCP funds, regional planning agencies with jurisdiction in the coastal zone, land trusts, watershed associations, the 21 coastal communities within the Rhode Island CELCP geographic boundary, and other interested parties. The RFA will also be posted on both the RICRMC and the Department of Administration web pages.

The RFA will include eligibility criteria that must be met for a project to even be considered by the state and NOAA, and will also include the specific evaluation criteria that will be used by RICRMC and other members of a review committee to rank and prioritize prospective projects. Attachment II provides draft evaluation criteria and ranking that should be considered at the time of submitting the RFA. This draft criteria will likely be modified to address any priorities requested by RICRMC that also meet the revised national criteria. These RICRMC priorities could include a particular regional focus, natural resource focus, enhanced non-federal match, or any other priorities.

Following the application submittal deadline, a CELCP proposal review committee will be established by RICRMC to help review and rank proposals. Possible members may include both state and federal agencies including RICRMC (chair), RIDEM (including the Narragansett Bay Estuarine Research Reserve), R.I. Statewide Planning, Narragansett Bay Estuary Program, National Resources Conservation Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Involvement at an advisory capacity by nonprofit organizations and coastal users may be considered.

Projects will be ranked primarily by the extent to which they satisfy the evaluation criteria contained in the RFA. Once the prioritization is complete, RICRMC and other state agencies will work with the selected project proponents to ensure that each of the selected applications are as competitive as possible before they are included in the Rhode Island comprehensive CELCP proposal package to NOAA. Rhode Island will be looking to NOAA to provide guidance on the number of acquisition priorities that may be acceptable and appropriate to be included within the comprehensive state application package that is submitted to NOAA.

IV. Coordination and Public Involvement

In Phase I of Rhode Island CELCP development, the RICRMC gathered information for a draft plan by convening a core group consisting of the following representatives.

Federal:

1. Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA)
2. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Department of the Interior)

State:

1. RICRMC
   - Habitat Restoration Team – Technical Advisory Committee
2. RIDEM
   - Land Acquisition Program
   - Natural Heritage Program
   - Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve
   - Rhode Island Trails Advisory Committee
3. R.I. Statewide Planning
   - Land Use (Greenways Program)
4. State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission
5. URI
   - Coastal Institute
   - Coastal Resources Center
   - Narragansett Bay Estuary Program
   - Rhode Island Sea Grant

Municipal:

1. Aquidneck Island Planning Commission
2. City of Cranston
3. City of East Providence
4. City of Pawtucket
5. City of Providence

Private:

1. American Planning Association: Rhode Island Chapter
2. Rhode Island Appalachian Mountain Club
3. Rhode Island Association of Conservation Commissions
4. Rhode Island Audubon Society
5. Rhode Island Conservation Summit
6. Rhode Island Canoe/Kayak Association

7. Rhode Island Land Trust Summit (included representatives from land trusts, watershed associations, and conservation commissions)
8. Rhode Island Saltwater Anglers Association
9. South County Bridle Lanes Association
10. The Aquidneck Island Land Trust
11. The Nature Conservancy
12. The Rhode Island Chapter of Surfrider Foundation

During Phase II of the development of this plan, RICRMC circulated a draft CELCP to the above organizations and all of the 21 municipalities for review, and held a public meeting in October 2004 to collect final comments. Comments were then incorporated into the CELCP as appropriate and then submitted to the full RICRMC in November 2004 for formal approval.

V. Certification and Approval

A. Certification that the plan is consistent with the state's/territory's approved coastal management program

The Rhode Island CELCP was prepared by the lead agency for administering the Coastal Zone Management Program, and is consistent with the state's approved coastal management program.

B. Approval of plan by designated official of state lead agency

Attachments:

1. **Plans and strategies considered in the development of the Rhode Island CELCP**
2. **Draft evaluation criteria to be considered by the RICRMC review committee**
3. **National CELCP criteria**

Plans and Strategies Considered in the RICELC Plan

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Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Plan for the State of Rhode Island and the Providence Plantations

Project Evaluation Criteria

The Rhode Island Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Plan (RICELC Plan) Review Committee shall evaluate grant applications based on the following scoring criteria (100 points total).

Only projects that meet the national CELCP criteria and are within the RICELC Plan project areas will reach this evaluation stage.

The RICELC Plan project areas are properties that: 1) are located within a federally approved SAMP boundary; and/or 2) contribute to expanding natural and/or recreational corridors.

(A) HABITAT PROTECTION (35 points)

1. ***Critical and/or Uncommon Habitat:*** The property supports and/or buffers critical and/or uncommon, ecologically fragile habitat, or is a unique ecological community in the state or region.

Habitat/Community Types considered:

- Estuarine Intertidal Wetlands
- Salt Ponds and/or tributaries
- Uninhabited Islands
- Coastal Plain Pond and/or Pond shore
- Maritime/Inland Dune Beach System
- Land abutting anadromous and catadromous fish runs
- Freshwater Tidal Marsh
- Open Peatland (Bogs and Fens)
- Vernal Pools or surrounding habitat that support vernal pool dependent species
- Morainal Grasslands
- Pitch Pine/Scrub Oak Barrens

2. ***Habitat Restoration:*** The property has the potential to be restored to a valuable natural habitat or community type. Restoration of the site would positively affect adjacent or nearby valuable habitat or communities (e.g. by controlling erosion, restoring natural hydrology, or reconnecting a fragmented landscape or habitat corridor (e.g. allowing agricultural lands to lie fallow).

3. ***Habitat That Enhances the Value of Existing Conservation Areas:*** Property lying adjacent to a conserved area that enhances the conservation value by increasing the overall size of the conserved area.

4. ***Urban Habitat Protection:*** Property is located in an urban or densely developed area where the habitat, open space, and/or educational values are particularly significant or unique.

5. ***Common Community Type:*** The property is representative of typical ecological communities in Rhode Island. This criterion seeks to preserve high-quality examples of common communities that support productive and diverse biological systems or common community types that are valuable because they are known to have extraordinary qualities (e.g. serve as a significant migratory bird stopover, freshwater wetlands and/or their tributaries, contain champion trees).

6. ***Habitat Diversity:*** The property includes managed early successional habitat (e.g. such as fields or shrublands) that provide necessary support for native resident or migrant species.

7. ***Rare/Endangered Species:*** The property supports or is capable of supporting rare/endangered species. The Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program current lists of rare/endangered species are the references used under this criterion.

   Descriptions of Rhode Island's current lists of rare/endangered species, can be found at: www.state.ri.us/dem/programs/bpoladm/plandev/heritage/index.htm

(B) RECREATIONAL RESOURCE (20 points)

1. Property fulfills a recreational need(s) in a geographic region (e.g. activity does not exist or there is a demand for more). Recreational need(s) could include hiking, hunting, nature walking, birding, equestrian, fishing, access for swimming or shellfishing, canoeing, kayaking, surfing, diving or research and educational activities.

2. Property enhances existing recreational infrastructure. This could include extends trail corridor, increases the number of recreational activities (e.g. acquire property for a kayak access point that abuts a property designated for hunting or fishing).

3. Property provides public access to the coast.

4. Serves the subsistence needs of low income and/or minority residents (e.g. fishing access points).

5. Acquisition enhances access for urban community to protected lands or parks.

6. Property is accessible by public transportation (e.g., bike trails, ferries, trains or bus) or is located within 100 yards of a public parking facility.

(C) HISTORICAL OR AESTHETIC RESOURCE (10 points)

1. Property has cultural, geological, or scenic value.
2. Acquisition enhances community character and quality of life.
3. Property adds aesthetic value to blue trail.

(D) PLANNING CONSISTENCY (15 points)

1. Property is within or contiguous to lands already identified as priority acquisitions or permanently protected by a Federal, State, or Municipal entity.

2. Acquisition of property is consistent with one or more of the following plans. The application must reference in detail the elements of each plan that relate to the acquisition proposal:

    - Local Comprehensive Plan
    - Local Open Space Plan
    - Rhode Island CRMC Special Area Management Plans
    - Regional or Watershed Plan.
    - Rhode Island Estuary and Coastal Habitat Restoration Strategy
    - Rhode Island coastal non- point pollution control plan
    - Rhode Island Fish & Wildlife Conservation Strategy
    - Rhode Island Anadromous Fish Restoration Plan
    - Rhode Island Coastal Resources Management Program and the Department of Environmental Management regulations
    - Rhode Island Greenways/Greenspace Element of the State Guide Plan.
    - Rhode Island Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) and its elements in the Ocean State Outdoors component of the Statewide Plan.
    - Designated on Flood Insurance Rate Maps published by the Federal Emergency Management Agency as Special Flood Hazard Areas (V and A Zones)
    - Narragansett Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve Land Use Plan
    - Narragansett Bay Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan

(E) WATER RESOURCE PROTECTION (10 points)

- ***Public Water Supply or Groundwater Recharge Area.*** The land is identified on the Drinking Water Supply Map which is available at: www.state.ri.us/dem/maps/index.htm Size of the property and percentage of land located within the watershed of the Public Water Supply or Groundwater Recharge Area will be considered.

(F) STEWARDSHIP AND MANAGEMENT (5 points)

1. The organization that will hold title to the property shows that it has the capacity to:

    A. Implement an existing comprehensive management plan that identifies the organization's goals for the property and how it plans to achieve them.

    B. Provide effective enforcement to manage trespass or overuse, vandalism, and safety hazards--and takes action to rectify such problems.

    C. Undertake regular monitoring to evaluate the effectiveness of the management plan.

D. Secure adequate funding for liability insurance, maintenance, improvements, property taxes, monitoring, and enforcement.

E. Perform administrative duties in a timely and responsible manner. (This includes establishing policies, keeping records, filing forms, paying taxes and insurance, budgeting, and maintaining correspondence files.)

(G) MULTI-COMMUNITY AND/OR PARTNERSHIP APPLICATION (5 points)

1. The property to be acquired or preserved is located in two or more communities or states.

2. A diverse number of organizations supports acquisition of property.

Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program
National Criteria

All candidate applications submitted by Rhode Island to NOAA for competition must comply with the following national criteria:

1. The property is located in one or more of the municipalities identified in the RICELCP map (figure 1).

2. Acquisition of the property would directly advance the goals, objectives, or implementation of state, regional or local land use or management plans.

3. Acquisition of the property would protect important coastal and estuarine areas that have significant conservation, ecological, historical, aesthetic, or recreation values, or that are threatened by conversion from their natural or recreational state to other uses.

4. Acquisition of the property would provide for access to the general public, or other public benefit, as appropriate and consistent with resource protection.

5. The applicant has secured a 1:1 non-federal match for the federal CELCP funds.

6. The property would be held in public ownership (fee simple or conservation easements) and provide conservation in perpetuity.

7. There is a commitment to stewardship and a satisfactory plan for meeting the long-term management and/or restoration needs of the property.